The food system is complex and composed of many interconnected factors, stakeholders, and sub-systems.

- But, it is often taught in a linear model from "farm to table" that fails to address social, environmental, and economic issues associated within the food system.

- Therefore teaching systems thinking allows kids to understand these complex issues with a holistic view of the food system.

Research Question

Does the implementation of a systems thinking approach broaden children’s understanding of a food system within outdoor education?

Internship/Methods

At Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center I developed and implemented:

1. Pre and Post Journal Prompt Activity
2. Food Web-Systems Thinking lesson plan

Journal Prompt: “Draw an image (Using pictures, words, and/or symbols) that represents the journey of food in the food systems, highlighting any/all of the interconnected parts that may play a role in the journey.”

Summary Of Results

The implementation of systems thinking showed to have positive effects on deepening children’s understanding of the food system’s complexities.

- An average of 1.8 more connections were made after kids participated in the systems thinking lesson plan. (See figure 4)
- Kids identified 1.6 more systems in their post journal prompt. (See figure 4)
- 67% of kids said they now think about their food and the food system differently.

Significance

- Implementing systems thinking into classrooms and outdoor education programs can increase children’s complex understanding, no matter the subject!
- Using a systems thinking approach when discussing the food systems can broaden the discussion of creating a more sustainable and just food system for all.

A special thanks to the Oxbow Education team for hosting me this summer and helping me navigate and implement my research project!